



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE JEW'S OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA

BY ABRAM S. ISAACS

AMERICA is an open door to opinions as well as to men, and ideas are emigrants that cannot be restricted. Happily, no law can bar them—and that is indicative of American progress. The opportunity afforded by our Republic to all creeds to display their best qualities without fear or prejudice is one which signifies, perhaps, more to Judaism than to any other religion. Here, where conditions are so favorable, it has a field for development in breadth, character, and usefulness which has never yet been possible. The Jew's breathing-spells have been so few, the transitions from comparative rest to superlative misery so many, that he has had no genuine opportunity for any length of time to reveal his creed's latent capacity for growth in relation to world problems and ideals. In America the cynic thinks the Jew will lose himself. Why may he not find himself? Full growth has been denied him almost from the beginning. It was Heine who wrote that the Greeks were children, while the Hebrews were men. Circumstance, however, has kept the Jew in his kindergarten these modern centuries, and, unhappily, a double wall encompassed him—the Ghetto within and without.

Now it might be asserted frankly that his "daughter-religions," Christianity and Islam, have exhausted any chance of further Jewish development, have supplied what mankind requires with a finality which is indisputable. In other words, according to this point of view, the Jew lags superfluous on the stage. Let him make his exit now—he has no further rôle to play. Yet the parent stock would appear to possess abundant vitality to have resisted disintegration since Palestine was exchanged for the universe. If still a wandering people, "roaming to and fro in the highways of the world," when the opportunity is within its grasp it may utter the right word and do the fitting deed to help realize its ideals with an energy and

irresistibility of which the world may have no adequate conception.

How can this be done? Granting that here at last the practical crucifixion of the race is no longer in evidence, and in the atmosphere of civil and religious freedom the Jew can live his religion, what methods of activity is he to follow? Shall he start propaganda, begin street demonstrations, organize a whirlwind campaign with the flag of Judah heading the procession, and canonize "Palestine, my Palestine," to the air of "Maryland, my Maryland"?

Such a programme is utterly foreign to Judaism. Its mission is peace, not war. Its message is not selfish aggrandizement. Its policy is never aggressive. It regards not the creeds as foes, but as partners in the work of human betterment. It is glad to learn from them and to co-operate with them when possible.

What, then, is to be the precise and definite programme on American soil? Obviously a mere outline only can be given within the limitations of these pages.

First and in its broadest meaning, simple living. That was the insistent cry of the prophets of old when conditions were strikingly modern, and it must again be heard to-day. The Jew whose fondness for idolatry took ages to be eradicated must resist luxury and the evils in its train as his foremost duty. If he really is appointed to be a witness among the nations, he must cease to take his color from his surroundings, but must prove superior to current tendencies that imperil his mission. In the final analysis Judaism stands for self-discipline. Its spirit makes for self-denial, self-sacrifice, and leads to the quiet, modest, simple life. To be a Jew must express more than to join the gay procession of ostentatious puppets, eager to ape the latest fashions, however degrading. He is not needed in the rôle of cringing lackey or glittering showman. Anybody can act in that capacity. The descendant of Moses and Isaiah and the long line of saintly men and women who kept and lived the faith must be of sterner stuff and loftier aim, or the glory of Ichabod is indeed departed for ever.

Then, too, he must widen his activity. What a few are doing more must do, so that it may be characteristic, not exceptional. To develop into successful men and women, to leave more or less comfortable fortunes to one's family, with occasional gifts to charities in which one is interested, this is laudable enough and calls for no criticism. A few Israelites

however, recognize that their duty goes further. They give of their wealth and personal service to other than specifically Jewish causes, without neglecting home interests. If the Jew claims that Judaism is the religion of humanity, he must heed ungrudgingly the call of the larger world and apply himself more zealously to solve its problems. Men like David Lubin, for example, or like Benjamin Altman, Joseph Fels, and Morris Loeb, who have recently passed away, are identified with activities that give to the multitude a new meaning of the term Jew. In art, literature, and the drama; in science, invention, and philanthropy; in education and public service—what precious opportunities for usefulness! These are brave beginnings, but only beginnings. A fuller, more generous participation is imperative. In barter and trade, in strictly commercial lines, no new emphasis need be laid. The danger lies in commercializing spiritual factors and pandering to low standards because it pays for the time in sales and audiences. That is the curse of much that passes for civilizing influences—and the Jew, of all men, is not needed to swell the crowd of panderers. Let him choose, then, some other name than son of Israel. When he makes for Baal he is a counterfeit. The contagion of his presence and example is not to be endured.

But still a third quality the Jew must possess in fuller measure—he must have vision without being a mere visionary. His aim must be higher, as his whole life must be purer and nobler, just because he is a Jew. There has been too much restriction in scope and vision. Open windows in the synagogue have always existed, out of which a few choice spirits caught a glimpse of the broader heavens. He would never have survived if there had not come to him songs in the night, dreams in captivity, longings in wretchedness, and gleams of light amid the stifling darkness. Such open windows gave him buoyancy and taught him patience to endure until spring would dawn and the shadows flee. Circumstance draping Jewish history in funeral crêpe peremptorily checked universalistic tendencies, and made the great mass look ever backward in their weakness and helplessness. The traditional fate of Lot's wife is always a warning and illustration. Is there not a bolder and more heroic alternative? To plant itself on God, virtue, and immortality, to develop as an active working force, and cease to be a mere reminiscence from the era of the Moabites and the Perizzites, and to accomplish in the realm of the spirit what has already been done in the world of trade—this implies for Israel no violent

break with tradition, but an evolution on more daring lines. Its small coterie of thinkers and workers who cherish such a vision must be strengthened and enlarged until the name Israel shall regain its original significance as wrestler for right living, at whatever sacrifice.

How impatient! how heartless! some critics might exclaim. How absurd to prate of vision and the mirage of humanity, when three-fourths of the Jews of the world are in the war zone, and the nearer duty calls on us to relieve the suffering and restore the broken-hearted. Let us wait until the war clouds have uplifted, and complete emancipation has been enjoyed by our brethren in Russia and Rumania.

That has always been the answer. Let us wait. Let us fold our hands and sleep still longer until the spirit slumbers and Judaism is atrophied as a real power among Jews. Here on American soil are no war clouds, and the calls to relieve the suffering are not so overwhelming as to stifle every other claim, banish every other duty. The thoughtful Israelite who does not delude himself knows that there is a rift within the lute, that readjustment is imperatively demanded, that the danger is imminent, despite current alleviations and rhetorical soothing draughts. The ethical foundations are being sapped and the synagogue is powerless.

Is the Jew in America ready to grasp the opportunity? Has he sufficient confidence in himself and his creed? *Noblesse oblige*. If he belongs to the aristocracy of the spirit, as he claims, let him cease to be a mere image in clay, but stand upon his own feet, think his own thoughts, live in his own age, and, no longer an echo, be a voice clear, emphatic, and convincing.

ABRAM S. ISAACS.